

# **Project on the Hill**

## **(Case Study)**

Fifteen members of a South Boston community service team spent a good portion of their 2001 summer on a hill – “Project On The Hill,” that is. Working alongside a half-dozen 14 to 18-year-old Youth Lead members and a diverse group of local artists, the “Southie” team from Youth Opportunity Boston’s Transitional Employment Program (TEP) helped transform an obscure, overgrown hill at Dorchester Heights into an eye-catching landscape of brick staircases, flower beds and wishing wells.

Youth Opportunity’s role in “Project On The Hill” dates back to the summer of 1998, when the project was in its early stages and YO was only just beginning to form its partnership with the project sponsors. “Project On The Hill” was the brainchild of South Boston artist Michael Donovan. A lifelong neighborhood resident and a long-time youth worker, Donovan had a vision: To turn the area of land behind South Boston High School, from a space of “negative youth activity” into an area that the entire community could embrace and take pride in.

On the way to making his vision a reality, Donovan secured a five-year grant from the Massachusetts Cultural Council (to cover materials, project infrastructure and staffing). His staff would include other local artists and youth from the community. Youth Lead became one of the local organizations that teens for the project were drawn from. Youth Lead’s programming includes a comprehensive curriculum of cultural enhancement and creative exploration. It involves art classes, community excursions, museum trips and of course, work on “The Hill.”

Youth Opportunity’s involvement in this community collaboration has grown and developed in four years. This past summer, the TEP’s Southie team devoted each of their Mondays to the project. They hauled bricks, rocks and mortar for walkways. They mixed and laid cement for stairs and wells. They cleared landscape and planted grass and flowers. But perhaps most importantly – as they worked side-by-side with other local youths and adults – they were empowered to make a difference.

“Project On The Hill” is still a summer away from completion. However, the progress made on it this past summer was remarkable. In an area formally strewn with trash, bursting with drug activity and shunned by the community, young people can now see people of all ages walking their dogs, admiring the wells and sculptures, and enjoying the beautiful landscape that this group created.